

Medicare Contracting Reform Industry Consultation with Beneficiary Organization Representatives

The meeting took place in Washington, D.C. on June 15, 2005 with representatives of two beneficiary organizations. Several topics related to contracting reform were discussed. The group stressed that it is important to keep in mind that some Medicare beneficiaries are in need of individualized assistance. The groups also suggested that problems often can occur when beneficiaries are not informed of their rights. Other topics covered include customer service, outreach and information and the annual survey.

Customer Service

- Continuity among contractors is important
- Training of Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) needs to be routine
- Timeliness is important
- Beneficiaries like to talk to a live person; would like to see some of recorded messages eliminated during business hours
- Concerned about the knowledge level of CSRs, especially evident when a beneficiary goes beyond basic questions
- Contracted services with language lines are not useful. Instead, contractors should have bi-lingual CSRs

Outreach and Information that CMS Should Provide Beneficiaries

- What info should be released to beneficiaries?
 - Contact information
 - Change in contractors
 - Changes in MSN
 - Sources of individualized assistance
 - Why changes are occurring and the rationale or impact on the beneficiary
- How should info be released?
 - Before changes occur
 - Direct mail from CMS or Social Security
 - Medicare.gov
 - Medicare & You

Survey

- Conduct focus groups across the country instead of in just one jurisdiction
- Conduct follow-up calls to select people
- Beneficiaries won't respond to written surveys
- Provide a number to call with a real person answering
- Some sort of survey should be performed (at least) annually